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EUR/NCE FOR TOM YEAGER
EEB/TPP/MTAA/ABT FOR MARCELLA SZYMANSKI AND JACK BOBO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRB](#) [TBIO](#) [KPAO](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIA: FY 2009 BIOTECHNOLOGY OUTREACH STRATEGY

REF: STATE 129940

11. (U) Summary. Post requests \$30,240.00 to fund agricultural biotechnology ("agbiotech") programs in FY2009. These programs will educate consumers, farmers, academics, and policy makers about the benefits of agbiotech, with the goal of assisting Bulgaria to become a successful model and advocate of agbiotech within the EU. Prior to its EU accession process, Bulgaria had been a biotech research and production pioneer, actively promoting and cultivating transgenic crops currently not approved for commercial planting in the EU. A major Biotechnology Law passed in 2005, virtually halting biotechnology research and cultivation. This legislation was highly restrictive and inconsistent with WTO standards and the European biotech legislative framework.

12. (U) Summary Continued: Post proposes a program that includes: three seminars in Sofia and secondary agricultural cities in Central and Northern Bulgaria; dissemination of educational materials; local outreach and broadcasting on the national television channels. Post's proposed programs build on previous successful technical assistance activities involving FAS, encouraging Bulgarian officials to recognize the commercial and environmental benefits of agbiotech so they can help shift the dialogue within the EU towards a more science-based and commercial approach. Another Mission objective is Bulgaria's adoption of more liberal, WTO-consistent biotech legislation, to firmly secure the future of the local viable biotech industry and educate a populace that does not currently understand the merits of biotechnology. By increasing efforts in Bulgaria now, the U.S. will have a strong European ally with common interests and shared beliefs to combat the EU's anti-GMO position in the years ahead. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

13. (U) Embassy Sofia has a well-defined biotechnology strategy supported by the U.S. biotech industry and important local stakeholders. With Bulgaria's EU accession, SEED funds available until 2008 for technical assistance have been terminated. The Embassy wants to complement its current strategy, which has focused on high-level biotech policymakers, with a broader public educational outreach campaign to reach the average consumer. Despite repeated attempts by a number of anti-biotech organizations to influence public opinion through sensational newspaper headlines,

to date consumers' rejection of bioengineered food is limited. Through a comprehensive public outreach plan touting the benefits of agricultural biotechnology we can shape more positive opinions. The proposed program builds on existing contacts, local expertise, as well as on USDA and FAS matching resources.

14. (U) The goal of the Embassy's public diplomacy initiative is to spur debate and discussion about biotechnology, create positive public opinion, and to provide broader availability of scientific information about agricultural biotechnology to both the media and consumers. Part of the educational campaign will target key opinion leaders in the following fields: media, education, the environment, and the food industry, among others. They will learn about the scientific, research and regulatory processes involved in agricultural biotechnology as well as the benefits for Bulgaria. Gaining key opinion leaders' support will help increase the public's awareness and trust in foods derived from GMO products. The proposed program has been discussed with and received the backing of local counterparts who have created an informal consortium to steer the program's activities and content. This Consortium includes: the National Agricultural Academy, National Biosafety Commission, agricultural and food research universities and institutes, the local Association of Agricultural Producers, and specialized media.

PROJECT PLAN

15. (U) The proposed program will be conducted within a nine-month timeframe and will conclude before end of FY09 via the following set of activities:

1A. Biotech Seminars: Three focus group discussions with media participation in three large urban areas of Bulgaria, where the main agricultural universities/research institutes are located - Sofia, Stara Zagora and Dobrich. To open and maintain dialogue among relevant groups and effectively communicate positive messages on biotechnology to the public, we will use formal presentations by identified local opinion leaders. International speakers and scientists will also be utilized. Participants will be recruited among university professors with relevant expertise, local industry representatives, and local media representatives, including television and radio commentators and newspaper reporters.

1B. Educational Materials: To complement the workshops and media events, English language publications on the benefits of biotechnology will be made available for translation into Bulgarian, to reach mass audiences with local language materials.

1C. Local Organization Outreach: Funding will be provided to host country organizations interested in promoting and disseminating positive information on agricultural biotechnology such as the Association of Agricultural Producers. These organizations will develop, publish and disseminate, on behalf of their organization, materials that promote GMO products and teach about their usefulness and safety. Materials printed by local organizations may carry more credibility and have a greater impact on consumer opinions than materials produced and disseminated by US organizations.

1D. Post envisions that one speaker with an academic and research background would address the growing acceptance of biotech worldwide, the implications of the favorable WTO ruling, and the positive safety and environmental implications of biotechnology. The other speaker, a farmer or seed association representative, would discuss the commercial and practical advantages. The academic message would resonate well with policy makers in the capital, while the message of someone with practical experience would be welcomed in farming towns.

16. (U) EXPECTED RESULTS: This project will influence the opinion of the average Bulgarian farmer/consumer towards biotechnology by focusing on price, health and other social benefits. This initiative will educate the media about biotechnology and expose professors, consumers and other participants to arguments explaining that biotech products are as safe as their conventional alternatives. By the end of the outreach campaign, the Mission expects that at least 30 press articles, as well as additional television and radio spots will be disseminated throughout the Bulgarian society. We project that a significant portion of the country's population will be exposed to positive GMO messages as a

result of this campaign. Additionally, the Association of Agricultural Producers will have gained greater recognition and credibility, and we believe the Media will continue to print positive updates on GMO issues as opposed to negative anti-GMO propaganda.

REQUESTED FUNDING

17. (U) Cost estimations for this activity are as follows:

- transportation, lodging, M&IE for organizers during planning/organizing stages: \$2,000
- rental rooms and conference packages: \$500/day * 3 = \$1,500;
- reproduction costs for materials to be distributed to participants: \$8 * 3 events * 40 participants = \$960
- support to local GMO promoters (bio-safety commission, Association of Agricultural Producers) to produce and disseminate pro-GMO publications: \$8,000
- translation and reproduction of materials into Bulgarian language: \$3,000.
- communication costs: \$1,000
- funding lodging M&IE for two local biotech speakers: \$200 * 7 days = \$1,400
- local transportation: \$800 * 2 persons = \$1,600.
- miscellaneous and unexpected costs: \$1,000;
- international airfare for two (2) International Speakers/Scientists: \$1200 * 2 = \$2,400
- M&IE and lodging \$220 * 9 days = \$1,980
- funding local travel for two international biotech speakers: \$300 * 8 days = \$2,400
- honoraria for International Speakers \$1,500 * 2 = \$3,000

Total budget: 30,240

18. (U) U.S. Embassy Sofia is contributing matching funds from FAS to cover the following expenses:

- FAS contributions to coordinating workshops, developing materials, recruiting speakers, translation, and overall oversight of project: \$10,000.

19. (U) Contributions from local Bulgarian Organizations include the above-mentioned members of the steering committee who will be responsible for the design of content of workshops, as well as the development and dissemination of published materials. A TV station (Agromedia) with nation-wide penetration has agreed to broadcast a series of weekly two-minute spots focusing on the project's message and events.

19. (SBU) Embassy Coordinator for this Project is Agricultural Attach Hoa Huynh, +359 2 9395704 or HuynhHV@state.gov. State contact officer is Pol/Econ Officer Kimberly Hawk, +359 2 937-5218. Please do not hesitate to contact both officers for additional information about this proposal. Post believes that we have reached a critical juncture as Bulgaria enters its third year of its EU membership. A strong push for public education is now needed to build momentum as Bulgaria seeks to position its biotechnology industry within the legal framework of the EU.

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